

# The Medical College of Utah at Morgan\*

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THE *American Medical Directory* lists among the medical colleges of the United States that have existed the "Medical College of Utah" located at Morgan City.<sup>1</sup> The section on medical college histories tersely states that it was founded in 1880, graduated a class in 1882, and was extinct in 1883.<sup>2</sup> Save for its listing in the *American Medical Directory* and brief mention in an unpublished thesis and in two books on Utah medical history, the Medical College of Utah has been almost entirely forgotten. The story of this Medical College is difficult to find. Inquiry made of historians familiar with Utah history revealed that none of them knew anything of the school except for the brief mention in the thesis and in the two histories which cited the thesis as their source of information. A search of the *Deseret News*, the West's oldest newspaper, and *The Salt Lake Tribune*, its principal rival, fails to reveal any mention of the Medical College of Utah during the years of 1879-1885. The Mormon-owned *Deseret News* and the then bitterly anti-Mormon *Tribune* were the largest papers in Utah during that time and normally would have carried comment on the school had it been considered important. No newspaper was published in Morgan during this period. A search of the historical collections of the University of Utah Libraries failed to reveal any further information on this medical school which antedated the founding of the University of Utah School of Medicine by some 25 years.

A letter written to the publisher of the *Morgan County News*, the weekly newspaper currently published in Morgan, brought only three responses—this in spite of the fact that the editor gave it front-page play with a two column by seven-inch article. A town reunion was held shortly after publication of the request. At this gathering of old-timers the Medical College was a major topic of discussion. Very few had even heard of the school, and those who had heard of it knew nothing about it save that they had heard that there had been one. So little had been thought about it that even the compilers and editors of a town history, then in preparation, had no information on the college.<sup>3</sup>

\* Murray Gottlieb Prize Essay, 1959.

<sup>1</sup> *American Medical Directory*, Medical School Key Table, inside front cover.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Durrant, Mrs. Don. Personal communication.

The key to the story of the Medical College of Utah was finally located with the assistance of the Historian's Office of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon Church). The Historian's Office has, since early pioneer days, been compiling *The Journal History of the Church*, an unpublished loose-leaf collection of newspaper clippings. Each day articles considered to be of importance to church history are clipped from the newspapers and are pasted on legal sized linen sheets which then are placed in looseleaf binders. Each article is indexed on 3 x 5 inch cards. A search of these cards disclosed five articles clipped from the *Salt Lake Daily Herald* during July and August, 1882.<sup>4</sup> This now defunct newspaper has been considered by many Utah historians to be of minor importance. The story of the "Medical College of Utah" turned out to be a graphic demonstration of the power of a newspaper, even a minor newspaper, in a frontier territory.

The chapter on medical education of Miss Blanch Rose's thesis, *The History of Medicine in Utah*, develops the theme of the growth of "Mushroom" or "Diploma Mill" medical colleges in the United States. She states her wonder that Utah was successful in not being afflicted with this plague, then adds: "However, it would appear that she did not completely escape a medical college. In 1883 [sic], the Medical College of Utah, was established in Morgan City. This school operated for two years, 1883-1884 [sic]. It graduated one class, 1884 [sic]. Practically nothing is known about this school by any of the present practitioners of medicine in Utah, except that it lasted less than two years, and turned out one graduating class. One wonders what prompted a group of doctors to establish a medical school in such an out of the way place, except the possibility of developing a reputation or in the hope of financial gain."<sup>5</sup> Miss Rose documented her source of information as "Personal interview with Dr. C. C. R. Pugmire, Salt Lake City, formerly of Morgan, Utah." Doctor Pugmire is deceased since the thesis was written in 1939.

Miss Rose questioned why a medical college should have been established in "such an out of the way place." But was it really "out of the way"? Hundreds of people travel through Morgan each day and although not as many travelled through in 1882 as do today it still had many visitors. Morgan is on the main transcontinental line of the Union Pacific Railroad and is only 24 miles east of Ogden, the junction of the Union Pacific and Southern Pacific Railroads. It is also on U.S. Highway 30 S, one of the most heavily travelled transcontinental highways. It is 41 miles from the Wyoming border and is the first town of significant size the westward-bound traveller entering Utah through Weber Canyon reaches. Salt Lake City is but 42 miles southwest. Twelve miles up Weber Canyon, at the hamlet of Henefer, the Mormon Trail, over which thousands of emigrants travelled, leaves Weber Canyon to follow the Donner Cutoff through East Canyon over Big and Little Mountains and down into

<sup>4</sup> The Journal History of the Church, July 27, 28 and 30, and August 3 and 26, 1882.

<sup>5</sup> Rose, Blanche, *The History of Medicine in Utah*, p. 141.

Emigration Canyon to Salt Lake Valley. Through Morgan itself passed the Hastings Cutoff trail to California. Thousands of forty-niners travelled through what was soon to be Morgan. From its very founding, Morgan has been on or near the main transcontinental pathways, and yet this sleepy-looking little farm town gives the impression to visitors that, if they blink while passing through, they will miss seeing it.

The founder of the Medical College of Utah anticipated Miss Rose's question, why the school was located in Morgan. In his "Third Annual Announcement" which was reprinted in the *Salt Lake Herald* he states, "The College was started in the belief that there was both a practical and necessary call for it. Morgan City was selected as its seat on account of its beautiful surroundings, in the midst of one of the most picturesque mountain sceneries on this continent."<sup>6</sup> He was correct in both of his premises.

The westbound traveller coming into Utah from Wyoming cannot help being impressed by the beauty of the Morgan City locale. He approaches Morgan through Echo Canyon with its brilliant red cliffs and buttes. (It was along these cliffs that the Mormons set up their defenses against Albert Sidney Johnson's invading army during the "Utah War" of 1857-1858. And Johnson's Army was not able to pass through Echo Canyon until peace had been negotiated.) At the confluence of Echo Creek and Weber River is located Echo Dam, with its picturesque mountain lake, one of the early reclamation projects of the United States Government. The Weber River, which rises high in the Uinta range alternately passes through rocky gorges and canyons and meadowed mountain valleys. Just east of Morgan it passes through a rocky gorge with an unusual outcropping of vertical rock strata known as the "Devil's Slide." The beautiful Morgan Valley opens just below the Slide. West of Morgan the river passes through "Devil's Gate," a gorge with walls so sheer and narrow that they frightened the Donner Party into back-tracking up Weber Canyon and into hacking their own cutoff through the mountains, a delay which contributed enormously to their downfall. The Morgan Valley is surrounded on all sides by the majestic Wasatch range of mountains. To the west is Bountiful Peak, to the northwest, Mount Ogden. It is a mountain paradise. Dr. Frederick S. Kohler was surely justified in his opinion.

The agitation for the formation of a medical school which finally culminated 25 years later in the foundation of the University of Utah School of Medicine justifies Dr. Kohler's assertion that a medical college was needed.

In spite of its beautiful surroundings and its location on transcontinental routes, Morgan City was a poor choice as a location for a medical college. The town, which had a population of 333 in 1890, did not have the population to support a medical college. The doctor opened his course with about six students in the first session.<sup>7</sup> The second session probably had about the same

<sup>6</sup> Salt Lake Daily Herald, July 27, 1882.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, August 3, 1882

number. Great plans were made for the third session, but fate deemed that it should never be held.

The history of Utah is inextricably entwined with that of the Mormon Church. The Mormons settled Salt Lake City and Utah. Towns like Morgan were founded by settlers assigned by the leaders of the Church to establish a community. Morgan itself had been founded under the direct leadership of Jedediah Morgan Grant, first counselor to Brigham Young in the presidency of the Church. In 1880, less than 20 years after it was settled, Morgan was very heavily Mormon. Dr. Kohler, a devout Presbyterian, was one of the very few non-Mormons.

Each Mormon community was presided over by a Bishop, an appointee of the church leaders in Salt Lake City. He was ordinarily chosen for his abilities, leadership, knowledge and wisdom. These abilities, of course, varied with the man but as a whole the Bishops were the outstanding individuals of the community. Each community had a right to reject its Bishop. In fact, once each year a special "Ward Conference" was held for the specific purpose of giving the community the opportunity to formally accept or reject the Bishop. Very rarely, however, was a Bishop rejected.

When Dr. Frederick S. Kohler entered Morgan it was only natural that he should approach the established community leader and other substantial citizens to tell them of his desire to form a medical college. The Bishop frequently headed community organizations other than the church "Ward," and apparently he approved the establishment of a medical college. Thus, the first president of the Medical College of Utah was the Bishop of Morgan Ward, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, William M. Parker. Dr. Frederick S. Kohler was dean of the faculty.<sup>8</sup>

The incorporation agreement filed in accordance with Utah Territorial Law was brief: "Know all men by these present, that we, whose names are hereby affixed, have associated ourselves together for the purpose of establishing in the City of Morgan, Territory of Utah, in accordance with the laws of said Territory an institution with corporate power and collegiate power to confer the degree of doctor of medicine, for the purpose of medical education by providing for courses of lectures and other methods of instruction, have associated ourselves for the period of twenty-five years under the name and style of Medical College of Utah. At a meeting held in the office of the Z.C.M.I. on Saturday, January 31st, 1880 at 2:00 o'clock P.M., all the members were present. Bishop W. M. Parker was elected president and Anthony Peterson, vice president, and James M. Mason was elected secretary. Should a vacancy occur in the board it may be filled by an election of two-thirds of the members, which shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of any business meeting relating to the institution. Done at the City of Morgan, in the County

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

of Morgan, Territory of Utah, this the 31st day of Jan. 1880. Signed W. M. Parker, A. Peterson and J. H. Mason."<sup>9</sup>

It is significant that the incorporation meeting should have been held in the office of the Z.C.M.I. This organization, Zion's Cooperative Mercantile Institution, had been organized eleven years before when trouble between Mormons and non-Mormon business men came to a head in Utah. The Mormons had felt that the gentile (non-Mormon) businessmen were being unfair to them. They also felt that these businessmen were the core of a bitter attack by gentiles against their church and its "peculiar institution," polygamy. In order to free themselves from dependence upon those whom they deemed to be their enemies the Mormon Church established a rival mercantile institution. A branch of Z.C.M.I. was established in nearly every Mormon town. These branches lasted for only about 10 to 15 years, the length of existence varying with the situation in the town in which the branch was established.<sup>10</sup> Z.C.M.I., however, continued after the demise of its branches and is today the largest department store in Salt Lake City and the largest wholesaler in Utah. Z.C.M.I. was the prestige point in Morgan. The doctor had chosen wisely if he hoped to obtain community support.

Shortly after the organization meeting a circular containing the following statement was issued:

BP. W. M. PARKER  
*President*

JAS. M. MASON  
*Vice-Pres.*

A. PETERSON, *Secretary*

#### MEDICAL COLLEGE OF UTAH

Morgan City, Morgan Co., U. T.

The regular lectures in this institution will commence on Wednesday, March 10th, 1880, and will close about the last of June. The second regular course will commence Nov. 1st, 1880, and continue sixteen weeks.

Fees: Matriculation, \$5.00. Tickets, term \$80.

The graduation fee is twenty-five dollars.

The location is a favorable one in the midst of one of the most beautiful mountain regions on the continent (Weber Station, U.P.R.R.)

For further information apply to

F. S. KOHLER, M.D.  
*Dean of the Faculty.*<sup>11</sup>

Mr. Samuel Francis, a resident of Morgan, reported to the *Salt Lake Herald* in August, 1882, that about six students attended throughout the first session.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Berrett, W. E. and Burton, A. P., Readings in L.D.S. Church History

<sup>11</sup> Salt Lake Daily Herald, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

The names of the students of the first session are unknown except for Mrs. E. Rich. The third announcement lists ten matriculates, one from Idaho, six from Utah (all from Morgan or nearby towns), two from Pennsylvania, and one from Iowa.<sup>13</sup> Mr. Francis disclaimed the presence of the matriculate from Iowa and one of the matriculates from Pennsylvania in Morgan City at any time from 1880 until July of 1882.

The 1882 announcement also lists four graduates: E. Rich, Idaho; J. F. Costello, Pennsylvania; B. Rush Kohler, Pennsylvania; and D. J. McCauley, Iowa.<sup>14</sup> No information is presently available about Costello and McCauley. These were the two whom Mr. Francis claimed were never in Morgan. Were these "paper" diplomas? Between June and November, 1880, Dr. Kohler went East to Vevay, Indiana, where he had formerly practiced, and purchased a skeleton for use in his classes.<sup>15</sup> Did he teach these two on this trip or before he came to Utah and then later issue them diplomas? These are the mystery graduates of the Medical College of Utah.

B. Rush Kohler is identified as Benjamin Rush Kohler, a son of the dean. Young Doctor Kohler later attended Western Reserve University School of Medicine, Cleveland, Ohio, where he obtained another medical degree. He then returned to his home in Reedsville, Pennsylvania, and practiced until his death, December 2, 1932.<sup>16</sup>

The other graduate for whom information is available was "Mrs. E. Rich." Mr. Francis identifies her as Mrs. Rich of Bear Lake County, Idaho, and states that she had been a practicing midwife for a number of years previous to her attendance at Morgan.<sup>17</sup> Bear Lake County, Idaho, did have a midwife named Mrs. E. Rich. She was Emeline Grover Rich, fifth wife of Apostle Charles Coulson Rich, one of the ruling Quorum of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Dr. Kohler had a prize pupil in Emeline Rich. Not only was she an outstanding student, but as a wife of an Apostle she was one of the select social group of Mormondom. An Apostle's wife was looked upon with great respect by other Mormon women, even, or especially, if she was one of six wives. Paris, Idaho, is located 130 miles north of Morgan just north of the Utah border. When Charles Coulson Rich and his wives led Mormon settlers into the Bear Lake country it was thought to be entirely in Utah; a survey made a few years later, however, established that the dividing line between the two territories split the lake almost in half. Thus Utah's Richland County (now Rich County) was divided to form Bear Lake County in Idaho. In these two counties Eme-

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> The Vevay Reveille-Enterprise, September 5, 1929, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Kohler, Mrs. Florence B., Lewistown, Pennsylvania. Personal communication.

<sup>17</sup> Salt Lake Daily Herald, *op. cit.*

line Rich practiced her medicine. Those who remember her remember her as a competent healer. Emeline Rich was awarded her degree at the end of the first session, according to Mr. Francis. A granddaughter of Charles Rich states that she never remembers "Aunt Emeline" using the title, Doctor,<sup>18</sup> but John Henry Evans's biography of Charles Coulson Rich states that Emeline practiced medicine in Bear Lake country for many years.<sup>19</sup>

Dr. Kohler prepared an announcement of 1882 which revealed great plans. It listed a faculty of four, himself as professor of anatomy and surgery and diseases of women and children in addition to being dean of the faculty; his son, B. Rush Kohler, as professor of chemistry and materia medica; a S. W. Howard, M.D., as professor of the practice of medicine and physiology; and Emeline Rich, M.D., as professor of obstetrics. Samuel Francis states that William Howard was unknown in Morgan County. Perhaps he was scheduled to come.

The third session of the Medical College never was held. It was scheduled to begin August 2, 1882. In July one of the announcements of the College fell into the hands of the *Salt Lake Herald*. The newspaper reprinted the announcement with a scathing denunciation in which it intimated that it had investigated the College with the help of the local practitioners of medicine in Salt Lake City.<sup>20</sup> Three days later the *Herald* published a rebuttal from a Morgan citizen. The citizen was none other than Bishop William B. Parkinson, Bishop of the North Morgan Ward, one of the most influential persons in the community.<sup>21</sup> Readers of his rebuttal who took a second look at the previous article could plainly see that this same Bishop was listed as a matriculate of the Medical College. "In answer to your query of yesterday, viz.: 'What is it?' in regard to the institution (well known in these parts) 'The Medical College of Utah,' I must truly say I am surprised at the ignorance manifested on your part in relation to the existence of this institution. If you really were in ignorance about the matter, why did you not apply to the president, secretary, or any of the trustees, who by the way are all bona fide residents, and honorable men in our community, or the matriculants, for information, which would have been given with pleasure? You can rest perfectly at ease. This institution is gotten up for the purpose of educating our people in the profession, thereby preventing so much cutting and quacking as heretofore existed in our country..." The *Herald* published Bishop Parkinson's letter but retaliated with a scathing editorial twice the length of the letter which said, in part, "Bishop W. B. Parkinson, of North Morgan Ward, is given space in this morning's HERALD to say some good things about Dr. Kohler and his 'Medical College of Utah,'

<sup>18</sup> Rich, Edith, Salt Lake City. Personal communication.

<sup>19</sup> Evans, John Henry, Charles Coulson Rich, Pioneer

<sup>20</sup> Salt Lake Daily Herald, July 28, 1882

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, July 30, 1882

and also to exhibit his want of manners, which latter does in the coarse [sic] and ungentlemanly tone of his communication . . . We have been expecting some such letter as Bishop Parkinson has written, but did not look for it to come from a bishop, with his full title set out to add to its authoritative character; and layman as the HERALD is it makes bold to suggest that the bishop has blundered this time if never before." Perhaps the readers of the *Herald* observed that the pot was calling the kettle black because the *Herald* certainly used the type of language that would make the Bishop stand up and defend his school.

The confidence of the town in its school was shattered. On August 3, one day after the session was scheduled to start, the *Herald* published another editorial and the lengthy letter from Mr. Samuel Francis, a Morgan resident. Both were extremely critical of the school. On August 26 the *Herald* published the following editorial, "Dr. Kohler, the head and front of the pretended 'Medical College of Utah' at Morgan City has left the country and gone to Denver. His departure was somewhat precipitate, occurring before the HERALD had gotten through talking about him and his college. The doctor was entirely too tenderhearted. If he were engaged in no wrong doing he certainly ought not to have fled when he was mentioned in the paper, and if his college were regular and legitimate he shouldn't have been ashamed of having the world know all about it. There is no disgrace in being principal of a Medical College. When the HERALD exposed the 'Medical College of Utah' it had no intention or desire to drive Dr. Kohler out of the territory. Our only purpose was to warn the public, both in Utah and out, against an institution that showed crookedness on its face, and to prevent the sale of bogus diplomas of the Dr. Buchanan order. The doctor having admitted guilt by fleeing and letting his college collapse, we are not sorry that Morgan has lost its doctor and its medical institution that, according to some of their too enthusiastic dupes, were going to do so much to revolutionize the practice and price of medicine. Morgan may meet [sic] a doctor, but the county can afford to get along without a physician who engages in business that cannot be talked about."<sup>22</sup>

Victory for the *Salt Lake Herald* seemed complete. Kohler was gone and so was the Medical College of Utah. Did the *Salt Lake Herald* do a service or a dis-service to its Territory? But was it complete victory? Did the *Herald* drive Dr. Kohler from the Territory? He may have gone to Denver in August of 1882. Probably the editorial campaign of the *Herald* had driven away the few students that he had. But Dr. Kohler remained a resident of Morgan until July or August of 1887, five years after the *Herald* campaign. He continued to

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, August 26, 1882

<sup>23</sup> Jordan, John W., *History of the Juniata Valley*, New York, Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1913. v. 2, p. 563



teach, but now his emphasis was on midwifery and was not aimed at producing doctors. It is claimed that more than twenty midwives were trained by him in these later years. When he left Morgan in 1887 he moved on to Nampa, Idaho, where he became one of the town's leading citizens. He died January 1, 1908.

Dr. Frederick S. Kohler was born December 18, 1836, in Milroy, Mifflin County, Pennsylvania. He attended public schools in Milroy and then spent a year or two at Dartmouth College. In 1860 he graduated with the M.D. degree from the Eclectic Medical College of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia. He was later commissioned an Assistant Surgeon in the Twenty-first Regiment of Pennsylvania Cavalry. After the Civil War he returned to Pennsylvania and settled in Reedsville where he practiced for twelve years. In 1872 he decided to take another course in medicine and chose the Medical College of Ohio, Cincinnati, where he graduated in 1873. He located at Mount Sterling, Ohio, for a short time, but moved on to Vevay, Indiana, where he practiced until 1879 when he moved on to Morgan City.<sup>23</sup>

Did Dr. Kohler make an honest mistake in choosing Morgan as a place to establish his college and then find he was not able to get others to help him teach or was he simply planning just another diploma mill? Was the campaign of the *Herald* justified? Perhaps Samuel Francis was right when he said, "I do not impugn the motives of Dr. Kohler. I believe him able to fill the chair he occupies in the Medical College. He is naturally unassuming, has a good reputation as a doctor, and those who attended his lectures say he is an able teacher, and high up in his profession. He certainly had no fraudulent intention in giving birth to the 'Medical College.' His strong inclination to be a teacher of his profession undoubtedly led him to overlook the greatness of the undertaking and its injurious consequences to the profession."<sup>24</sup>

One question that will never be answered is the effect that the Medical College would have had on Utah if it had continued.

At least one individual was profoundly influenced by Dr. Kohler's teaching. Shortly after the Medical College of Utah closed its doors Bishop Parkinson resigned his position as Bishop of the North Morgan Ward and went to Chicago. In 1883 he received his degree as a doctor from Rush Medical College. He later received another medical degree at the University of Louisville and returned to Utah to practice at Logan.

The whole story of the Medical College of Utah may never be known, but at least we now know that it was founded January 31, 1880 and that it survived until August, 1882. We know the names of the four graduates it claimed: Emeline Grover Rich, Benjamin Rush Kohler, J. F. Costello, and D. J. McCauley. At least one more student, William B. Parkinson, later received his medical degree. Finally, we know the immediate cause of its demise. Whether or not the school would have existed much longer is questionable, but the death

<sup>24</sup> Salt Lake Daily Herald, op. cit.

knell was tolled by a vigorous campaign by a small frontier newspaper, *The Salt Lake Herald*.

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